

Vietnamese Civil Servants' Public Service Ethics

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Abstract

In public service activities, the ethics of civil servants is considered one of the criteria for evaluating the quality of civil servants, often clearly legislated. This is an important assessment content because civil servants are those who exercise state power and serve the people. The issue of public service ethics is identified as having many contents; In this study, the author inherits some basic content from previous studies to build a theoretical framework for research on civil servants' public service ethics, including political thoughts; and public service responsibilities. The author surveyed 300 leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including Lang Son province (Northern region), Quang Binh province (Central region), and Tay Ninh province (Southern region). The survey aims to collect information to evaluate the ethical practice of civil servants' public service ethics of commune-level - those who directly handle people's requests. Survey results show that commune-level civil servants have public service ethics that meet the requirements of performing public duties expressed through political thoughts; and public service responsibilities. However, leaders of local government agencies evaluate civil servants' public responsibilities at a lower level. From the results of this research, the author discusses

practical issues that need to be researched and adjusted to improve the quality of local civil servants to meet the requirements of serving the people.

Keywords: Public service ethics; Political thoughts; Public service responsibilities; Vietnamese civil servants.

1. Introduction

Vietnam's local government is a large system, including 63 provincial governments, 705 district governments, and 10.599 commune-level governments (GSO, 2022). In this system, the commune-level government has the characteristics of being close to the people, and regularly resolving people's requests. Civil servants of each commune-level government agency are prescribed by law to have 7 positions: Police Chief, Military Commander, Office - Statistics, Land Administration - Construction - Urban - Agriculture - Environment, and Finance - accounting, justice - civil status, culture - society (VG, 2011; MOHA, 2019).

Vietnam's administrative reform process has set high requirements for the quality of civil servants to meet the requirements of serving the state and the people. According to general assessment, local civil servants in general and commune-level civil servants in particular have changed in a positive direction: The majority have good qualities, qualifications, capacity, and ethics; The operational efficiency of commune-level government agencies is confirmed. However, in many localities, there is still a situation where commune-level civil servants have not performed well in terms of public service ethics, and have not fully demonstrated their responsibilities in performing public duties and serving the people (VG, 2021). This reality is one of the limitations, posing challenges for managers in promoting the capacity and civil servants' public service ethics and the operational efficiency of commune-level local government agencies.

For the above problem to be resolved, it is necessary to conduct research and surveys on contents related to public service ethics of civil servants. With that meaning, the author conducts theoretical research and practical surveys on public service ethics of commune-level civil servants to contribute to clarifying the above

issue and suggesting appropriate solutions to improve the quality of civil servants meeting the requirements of serving the people in the context of administrative reform in the period 2021-2030 in Vietnam.

2. Literature review

a) Civil Servants' public service ethics (PE)

In the field of research, many researchers approach and analyze public service ethics, mainly expressed in the aspects of Political awareness; work spirit; responsibility for assigned work; and attitude to serve the people (Thai, PH, 2016; Thang, NV, 2020). This issue was analyzed in detail by researchers, and the author inherited and synthesized into three basic contents, which are: Civil servants strictly comply with the law and administrative discipline of the agency (PE1); Civil servants are willing to accept assigned tasks and take responsibility for the results of performing assigned tasks (PE2); Civil servants are ready to serve the people and dedicated to serving the people (PE3).

Strictly complying with the law and the agency's administrative discipline is the working principle of civil servants as prescribed by law; become the annual evaluation standard for civil servants' public service ethics in Vietnam. Civil servants' willingness to accept assigned tasks and take responsibility for the results of performing assigned tasks is a content that reflects the attitude of civil servants in public service activities; This is both a basic requirement and a regular requirement, whereby civil servants must always demonstrate a willingness to accept assigned tasks and ensure the progress and quality of performing assigned tasks. Willingness to serve the people and dedication to serving the people demonstrates the democratic nature and service nature of state government agencies; and civil servants are representatives of government agencies to exercise state power, serve and meet the legitimate demands of the people.

In state management activities, public service ethics is a political and legal issue, often prescribed by law and strictly implemented by civil servants. Vietnamese lawmakers regulate public service ethics associated with the following content: Political ideology; and public service responsibilities (VNA, 2008; VG, 2020).

It is possible to see similarities in the context of legal regulations and the content of research on public service ethics, because of the political and legal characteristics of the term “public service ethics”. In this study, the author determines the research content on civil servants' public service ethics on the basis of inheriting and developing the content of provisions of Vietnamese law on public service ethics, including political thoughts; and public service responsibilities.

b) Political thoughts (PT)

Political thoughts are the awareness and attitude of civil servants about the country's political goals, national interests, and national interests. Civil servants have good political ideology, shown through the main contents (VG, 2020): Civil servants are loyal to the fatherland; loyalty to the nation's political goals (PT1); Civil servants put the interests of the country, the interests of the nation, the interests of the people, and the interests of the collective above personal interests (PT2); Civil servants are steadfast in their political stance and serve national and ethnic development (PT3).

Civil servants have the obligation to be loyal to the fatherland and to the country's political goals; This content represents the spirit, and the will to strive and contribute to the country, and is deeply engraved in the awareness of each civil servant. When civil servants put the interests of the country, the people, the people, and the collective above their personal interests, they are aware of their political responsibility to the fate of the country and with the people. On the other hand, when civil servants are steadfast in their political stance, they will demonstrate strong political views and bravery in all circumstances; Unwavering in the face of all difficulties and challenges to fulfill the duty of serving and serving the development of the nation and people.

At all times, political thoughts have always been the standard for evaluating civil servants. When civil servants have good political thoughts, they will determine action goals consistent with national interests, national interests, form political culture, and public service ethics, and have stability in perception and actions of public officials.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). Political thoughts are a factor that shapes public service ethics, having a direct impact on civil servants' public service ethics.

c) Public service responsibilities (PR)

From a political and legal perspective, civil servants are identified as servants of the people and have the responsibility to wholeheartedly serve the people (VNA, 2008; VNA, 2013). In terms of research, Public service responsibilities of civil servants are reflected in the results of implementing assigned tasks both in terms of progress and quality (Tung, L.S., 2021; Trung, N.S., 2022). Therefore, civil servants have good public service responsibilities, shown through the main contents: Civil servants are responsible for performing tasks and ensuring the progress of assigned work (PR1); Civil servants are responsible for performing tasks and ensuring the quality of assigned work (PR2); Civil servants have a responsibility to serve and dedicate themselves to serving the people (PR3).

In public service activities, each assigned task has a deadline for completion and product quality goals to be achieved; Therefore, civil servants must be responsible for ensuring the timely and quality implementation of their duties. This is a basic requirement for each organization's human resources. However, civil servants, with their constitutional role, are dedicated to serving the people to realize the goals of the rule of law: State of the people, by the people, for the people; State power belongs to the people; Therefore, civil servants have the responsibility to wholeheartedly serve the people, ensuring the people's legitimate rights and interests.

In public service activities, when civil servants promote their responsibilities, they will always complete their assigned tasks well, forming a culture of responsibility in performing public duties, public service ethics, and stability in perception. and actions of public officials.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). Public service responsibilities is a factor that forms public service ethics, having a direct impact on civil servants' public service ethics.

From the above general research content, the author has built a theoretical framework for research on civil servants' public service ethics. The research model includes 3 scales: The scales "Political thoughts", "Public

service responsibilities” (02 independent variables) and the scale “Civil Servants' public service ethics” (01 dependent variable). The above scales include 9 observed variables, designed by the author into 9 questions in the survey questionnaire and measured using a 5-level Likert scale: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - No opinion; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly agree (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. Research theoretical framework

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
I	Political thoughts	PT					
1	Civil servants are loyal to the fatherland; loyalty to the nation's political goals.	PT1					
2	Civil servants put the interests of the country, the interests of the nation, the interests of the people, and the interests of the collective above personal interests.	PT2					
3	Civil servants are steadfast in their political stance and serve national and ethnic development.	PT3					
II	Public service responsibilities	PR					
1	Civil servants are responsible for performing tasks and ensuring the progress of assigned work.	PR1					
2	Civil servants are responsible for performing tasks and ensuring the quality of assigned work.	PR2					
3	Civil servants have a responsibility to serve and dedicate themselves to serving the people.	PR3					
III	Civil servants' public service ethics	PE					
1	Civil servants strictly comply with the law and administrative discipline of the agency.	PE1					
2	Civil servants are willing to accept assigned tasks and take responsibility for the results of performing assigned tasks.	PE2					
3	Civil servants are ready to serve the people and dedicated to serving the people.	PE3					

Source: Compiled by the authors from the literature review

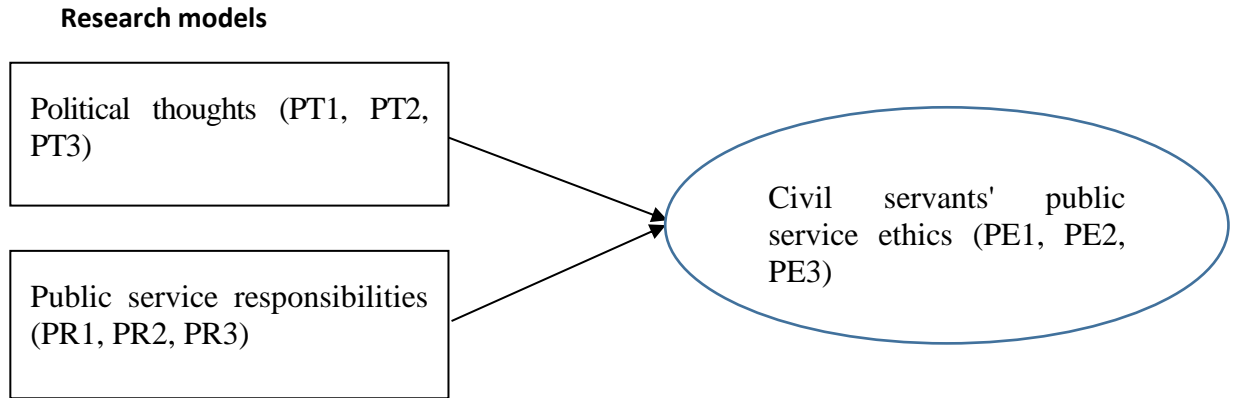


Figure 1. Research model

3. Research methods

a) Qualitative method

Qualitative research is a form of research often used for the purpose of probing and understanding opinions and viewpoints to find a comprehensive and thorough view of the problem and discover trends of future research issues.

The author uses qualitative methods through in-depth questioning, organizing feedback on the overall research content, and comments on initial research conclusions to have an overview and complete the theoretical framework. Research theory on public service ethics of civil servants. The theoretical research framework was built, including scales: Political thoughts (PT); Public service responsibilities (PR); civil servants' public service ethics (PE) [Table 1].

b) Quantitative method

Quantitative research is a form of research that is often performed through collecting and analyzing information on the basis of data obtained from investigations and surveys. The purpose of quantitative research is to draw conclusions through the use of statistical methods to process data and figures.

The author uses quantitative methods by collecting and analyzing primary data by directly surveying 300 leaders of commune-level government agencies of 3 provinces representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including Lang Son province (Northern region), Quang Binh province (Central region), and Tay Ninh province (Southern region). The survey content was designed according to the established theoretical

framework. With the survey results obtained, the author conducted a regression analysis to test the relationship between the scales and the proposed research hypothesis.

In quantitative research, the minimum sample size needed to perform regression analysis for this study's model of 3 scales and 9 observed variables is $N = 9 \times 5 = 45$ (Hair, J.F. et al., 2009). The author surveyed the opinions of 300 leaders of commune-level government agencies with a sample size of $N = 300 > 45$ to ensure the reliability of data collection. The survey results are: 300/300 leaders of commune-level government agencies agreed to answer and 300/300 valid answer sheets, reaching a valid response rate of 100%.

4. Research results

With data collected from the opinion survey of 300 leaders of commune-level government agencies, the author conducted a Cronbach's Alpha test to identify the degree of reliability of measurement scales and observed variables in the research model. According to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), the conditions for scales to be reliable are Cronbach's alpha > 0.6 ; The condition for observed variables to be reliable is Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3 . The test results show that all 3 scales and 9 observed variables are reliable (Table 2).

Table 2. Statistical and scale testing results

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. Political thoughts (PT)	PT1	300	2	5	4.25	.437	.749	PT1 = .564
	PT2	300	2	5	4.18	.441		PT2 = .571
	PT3	300	2	5	4.06	.392		PT3 = .619
2. Public service responsibilities (PR)	PR1	300	1	5	3.65	.636	.696	PR1 = .564
	PR2	300	1	5	3.59	.662		PR2 = .553
	PR3	300	1	5	3.69	.598		PR3 = .568
3. Civil servants' public service ethics (PE)	PE1	300	2	5	4.11	.633	.711	PE1 = .612
	PE2	300	1	5	4.04	.602		PE2 = .637
	PE3	300	2	5	4.03	.614		PE3 = .623
Valid N (listwise)		300						

Source: Authors' survey results

Table 2 data shows:

+ Observations on the scales “Political thoughts” (PT), “Public service responsibilities” (PR), “Civil servants' public service ethics” (PE) are all evaluated at Mean > 3.5, statistically significant according to the defined Likert scale (1-5); civil servants are assessed to have basic public service ethics that meet the requirements of public service activities. However, the observed variables of the scale “Public service responsibilities” (PR) are rated at the lowest level with Mean (PR1) = 3.65, Mean (PR2) = 3.59, Mean (PR3) = 3.69, shows that civil servants’ public service responsibilities (progress of assigned work, quality of assigned work, serving attitude for the people) was rated low by local leaders. This is a factor that greatly affects the commune-level civil servants' public service ethics.

+ All 3 scales and 9 observed variables in the model have standardized test values: Cronbach’alpha > 0.6; Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3. These scales continue to be used to perform a regression analysis to examine the relationship of the independent variables “Political thoughts” (PT), “Public service responsibilities” (PR) with the dependent variable “Civil Servants' public service ethics” (PE) [Table 3].

Table 3. The outcomes of multivariable regression

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	VIF
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.611	.210		2.267	.000	
	Political thoughts (PT)	.433	.046	.371	3.957	.000	1.742
	Public service responsibilities (PR)	.241	.057	.293	6.873	.000	1.742

a. Dependent Variable: Civil servants' public service ethics (PE)
R Square = .771; Durbin-Watson = 2.004

Source: Authors’ survey results

The regression analysis data in Table 3 shows that:

+ R Square = .771, confirming that the scales “Political thoughts” (PT), “Public service responsibilities”

(PR) can explain 77.1% of the variation in the “Civil servants' public service ethics” (PE).

+ VIF = 1.742 ($1 < \text{VIF} < 2$), showing that the regression model does not have multicollinearity; Durbin-Watson = 2.004 ($1 < d < 3$), showing that the regression model does not have autocorrelation. This confirms that the scales “Political thoughts” (PT), “Public service responsibilities” (PR) are independent, and have the same impact on the scale “Civil servants' public service ethics” (PE).

The regression coefficients of the two independent variables “Political thoughts” (PT), “Public service responsibilities” (PR) are both statistically significant with Sig. = 0.000 (Sig. < 0.05) and has a positive value: B (PT) = 0.433, B (PR) = 0.241, confirming the positive relationship between the two independent variables “Political thoughts” (PT), “Public service responsibilities” (PR) and 01 dependent variable “Civil servants' public service ethics” (PE); hypotheses H1, H2 are accepted.

Applying the generalized regression model of Hair, J.F. et al. (2009): $Y = B_0 + B_1 * X_1 + B_2 * X_2 + \dots + B_i * X_i$, the author determined the regression model of the study. This is as follows:

$$PE = 0.611 + 0.433 * PT + 0.241 * PR$$

Based on the unstandardized regression coefficients of the scales as independent variables: B (PT) = 0.433, B (PR) = 0.241, it can be confirmed that the degree of correlation of the independent and dependent variables according to the ascending order is: “Public service responsibilities” (PR), “Political thoughts” (PT).

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of testing the scale and the results of the regression analysis mentioned above, the research conclusion is confirmed: Local leaders underestimate the public service responsibilities of commune-level civil servants. This can be considered a limitation on the public service ethics of local civil servants, which has a negative impact on the results and effectiveness of performing tasks of civil servants and government agencies. From the conclusion of this research, the author suggests solutions for local leaders, which are: Evaluating public service

responsibilities of civil servants, combining internal assessment - internal assessment; External reviews - people rate.

The above solution is necessary to be implemented, because in Vietnam today, the assessment of civil servants, including the assessment of public service responsibilities, is carried out in a general way, that is: Civil servants self-assess; The agency approves and recognizes the results of annual civil servant evaluations of each unit and department (VG, 2020). This evaluation method is internal in nature, the evaluation results are not objective due to familiarity and respect. The activities of civil servants and government agencies are social governance activities, serving the people, and meeting the people's legal requirements. Therefore, it is very necessary to organize the collection of people's opinions on the public responsibilities of civil servants in the process of resolving people's requests. This is done regularly, which will help managers get objective, multi-dimensional information about the public service responsibilities of local civil servants so that they can make timely policy adjustments.

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